

**SELECTIONS FROM
TENNYSON'S
IDYLLS OF THE KING**

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Selections from Tennyson's Idylls of the King by Alfred Tennyson

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ALFRED TENNYSON

**SELECTIONS FROM
TENNYSON'S
IDYLLS OF THE KING**

English Readings for Schools

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SELECTIONS FROM
TENNYSON'S
IDYLLS OF THE KING

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Somersby Rectory, Tennyson's Birthplace

INTRODUCTION

I

TENNYSON'S LIFE AND WORKS

ALFRED TENNYSON was born on August 6, 1809, at Somersby, Lincolnshire, where his father, the Rev. Dr. George Clayton Tennyson, was rector. His mother, Elizabeth Fytche, was a great beauty, whose lovely nature he described in his poem *Isabel*. The family was old and honorable, but the future laureate was born into a household rich only in genius and health. He was the fourth of twelve children, all of them brilliant, who by the force of their own natures made their childhood singularly happy. Dr. Tennyson, who bequeathed his intellectual greatness to his family, was of an unhappy temperament, and his cares must have harassed him. "A man of sorrows," his son called him after his death. But the children turned their simple circumstances into

a fairy world. Their games were either highly athletic or highly imaginative. They would tell each other stories, or sometimes they would write them in letter form and hide them under the vegetable dishes at dinner, to be read when the dishes were removed; sometimes of an evening Alfred would take a younger sister or brother on his knee, with the others crowding round, and would hold them fascinated for hours. His rendering of his own stories was so dramatic that the family expected him to turn out an actor.

For a few years Alfred lived with his grandmother at Louth, and went to the grammar-school there, but after 1820 he was prepared for college by his father. How precocious a child he was is proved by the criticism of *Samson Agonistes* written for his aunt when he was twelve years old; the letter can be read in the *Memoir* by his son. He was so overcome with a sense of loss when Byron died in 1824, that the "whole world seemed to be darkened," and he carved on a rock the words "Byron is dead." His earliest verse was composed on a slate when he was eight years old. His elders, however, took the boy's gift complacently, or else for his own sake they pretended to do so. In his old age Tennyson liked to recall that his grandfather had given him money for some verses on his grandmother's death, saying, "Here is half a guinea for you, the first you have ever earned by poetry, and take my word for it, the last."

As Tennyson grew into youth, he had the advantage, not only of his father's excellent teaching at home, but of the companionship of his brothers, all only less gifted than himself. They read together Shakespeare, Milton, Burke, Goldsmith, Rabelais, Addison, Swift, Defoe, Cervantes, Bunyan, and other authors; and they expressed themselves habitually in verse or prose as though they